



Annual Report 2021/2022

MARGARET RIVER
BUSSELTON
TOURISM
ASSOCIATION

FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 2022

MRBTA.COM



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MRBTA honours the traditional owners of this land, the Wadandi (Saltwater) people, and their elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the Wadandi people's 60,000-year custodianship of this special place, and we thank them for generously sharing with us their immensely deep cultural knowledge and connection to the land.

1. Chair Report

2021/22 has been a pivotal year for tourism globally. As a growing number of countries around the world have eased restrictions on travel, it has become clear that the motivations and considerations of travellers have changed in ways we could not imagine three years ago. Our task over the last year has been to respond to the immediate needs of members as we grapple with the challenges the Pandemic has presented, while keeping our gaze firmly on the horizon to ensure prosperity for our industry and community into the future.

Regional visitation

In terms of visitor numbers and spend, the Margaret River Region has performed well over the past year. Total visitor numbers and spend have continued to exceed pre-Covid levels, despite interstate and international travel being restricted for most of the year.

The region welcomed 1.659 million domestic visitors for the year ending June 2022; an average 3-year annual growth rate of 20%. Spend has also increased, up 129% to \$2.3 billion across the South West, compared with pre-Covid numbers.

International arrivals into Western Australia have recovered to 46% of pre-Covid levels. While key international markets for the region such as Singapore and UK are yet to rebound to their pre-Covid numbers at 79% and 63% respectively, businesses working with these markets have certainly experienced welcome relief after surviving without their presence for two years.

Tourism as a positive force

Preparations for the return of global travel has provided the MRBTA Board with opportunities for renewed direction, and to position the region for success in the long term.

In May 2022 we released our Strategic Directions 2022-25, which looks at the kind of visitors we wish to attract, how to ensure that the region is able to sustain the impacts of tourism activity, and the way in which tourism can benefit the whole community of this place we cherish.

The Board is of the firm view that tourism will continue to be a leading industry in our region:

- When it attracts visitors who are responsive to and aligned with the values of our community,
- When its contribution in support of our community's economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing ensures that tourism is truly a regenerative rather than an extractive industry
- With the inspiration of 60,000 years of continuous occupation by the Wadandi people, which is of profound lasting benefit to the region and its people.

A key element of the Strategic Directions is the establishment of Capes Foundation, which commenced this year. Capes Foundation brings together MRBTA's eight attractions under a single banner and sees MRBTA working alongside our members to shape visitor experiences and care for some of the region's key natural and heritage assets.

1. CHAIR REPORT

Capes Foundation also provides a platform for MRBTA to facilitate and coordinate regionwide initiatives that can generate economic, social, cultural and environmental outcomes of benefit to both visitors and the local community. These include:

- National Park 6 Point Recovery Plan: A plan for the recovery and improved management of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park was co-signed in December 2021 by the MRBTA, Shire of Augusta-Margaret River, Undalup Association, Nature Conservation Margaret River Region, Margaret River Wine Association, Margaret River Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Transition Margaret River and the South West Catchments Council. Points from the Plan have been adopted into the Conserving the Capes business case under consideration by the State Government and we remain hopeful of a commitment to this critical regional asset.

- Unbeaten Tracks: The long-term initiative to upgrade and provide connectivity across the region's trails network, including the Cape to Cape Track and Wadandi Track, has also been adopted as part of the Conserving the Capes business case.
- Ngilgi Cave Ancient Lands: \$1.35 million in federal government funding, and a further \$360,000 in state government funding has been secured to support an ambitious new above-ground experience at Ngilgi Cave, bringing to life over 600 million years of stories associated with this region. The experience will include a new state-of-the-art Aboriginal tourism facility for tours conducted by Koomal Dreaming. It is planned that Ancient Lands will welcome its first visitors in June 2023.
- Rounding the Cape: Envisages a circuit walk around the Cape Leeuwin headland to strengthen its positioning as one of the three great capes of the Southern Hemisphere. The walk incorporates interpretive stopping points and a trailhead for the Cape to Cape Track and the proposed Leeuwin Track to Augusta.

- Undalup Association Partnership: MRBTA continues to invest in initiatives that support the continuity of our region's rich Wadandi cultural heritage, including cultural exchanges and the Wadandi Surf Academy.
- Eagles Heritage: Phil and Cathy Pain's pioneering work to care for and rehabilitate injured, orphaned and displaced birds of prey has been able to continue under the auspices of MRBTA. Significant investments to upgrade facilities and interpretation are underway and will continue for many years.

It is unprecedented for a Local Tourism Organisation (LTO) to engage in strategic regional tourism initiatives in this way. Strengthening our leadership of the region's tourism industry opens up new ways for MRBTA to benefit its members as we grow our traditional remit of providing tactical consumer exposure via our marketing and visitor servicing channels.

1. CHAIR REPORT

Financial performance

MRBTA has the capacity to produce outcomes within this broad strategic remit thanks to a unique business model, which generates revenue through a number of channels, including the provision of the eight attractions-based experiences and by providing ground handling services at Busselton Airport.

In 2021/22 admissions income from Capes Foundation attractions decreased due to the absence of interstate and international visitation, the temporary closure of Lake and Mammoth Caves after the bushfire in Boranup Forest, and the closure of Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse tower for restoration for most of the year. Revenue has been buoyed by ground handling income and staff training incentives. Our resulting EBIDA has normalised after delivering a heightened operating surplus in 2020/21 due to JobKeeper and other Covid related government subsidies.

The Board is pleased by the organisation's financial performance in 2021/22, which shows that for every dollar invested by members MRBTA has been able to invest

a further five dollars into destination marketing, visitor servicing and member training and development.

As the new financial year has begun, there are encouraging signs that admissions to Capes Foundation attractions are recovering well.

Leadership

During the development of the Strategic Directions, the Board decided to refine and refocus the management structure to provide MRBTA's new aspirations with the best chance of success. A single CEO model was adopted, with Sharna Kearney appointed to the role.

Sharna is supported by a passionate and experienced team, including Steve Harrison, Cinde Fisher, and Jenny Lee, who lead the Capes Foundation, Corporate Services and Tourism divisions respectively.

It is my privilege again to thank the Associations three former Joint CEOs—Sharna, Steve and Cinde—for their highly collaborative, intense and expert leadership of the organisation over the previous four years.

As always, the MRBTA team has carried out its work with an outstanding level of professionalism and pride. I proudly acknowledge the incredible commitment of the whole team throughout what has been another year of transition.

I also acknowledge the work of my colleague MRBTA Board Members, who have provided visionary and rigorous guidance during this time. On behalf of all members I thank retiring Director Barry House for his excellent contribution to the Board since joining in 2020. Barry chose this year not to re-nominate for election to the Board in order to focus his formidable energies on his other activities and, in particular, on the Busselton Jetty Inc., which he chairs. We wish him well in those endeavours.

Deputy chair Janine Carter is standing down from that position, I thank her for her service and support and am delighted that she will continue as a valued member of the Board. The Board will elect a new Deputy Chair when it meets after the AGM.

1. CHAIR REPORT



Our Partners

Our deep appreciation goes to our partners, including the City of Busselton, Shire of Augusta-Margaret River, Tourism WA, Australia's South West, Margaret River Wine Association, Undalup Association, the South West Development Commission and our local Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the exceptional contribution of MRBTA's 657 member businesses – our closest partners – who work day-in, day-out to provide visitors with memorable experiences and who are the heartbeat of our thriving tourism community.

As we strengthen our collective vision for the region, I have every confidence in our ability to foster a local tourism industry which attracts visitors who share our values, and to secure positive economic, social, environmental, cultural and Aboriginal outcomes for our community.



2. CEO Report

Since the reopening of WA's borders in March 2022, this region has found itself in the spotlight as a destination of choice for returning interstate and international visitors, and we have worked alongside our members to position the region for success.

Together with our partners and members we have proudly seen much of our collective effort over the last two years come to fruition, including the arrival of the first direct flights from the east coast in April 2022 and the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River becoming the first destination in WA to achieve ECO Destination status in June 2022.

For members relying heavily on interstate and international visitation, the reopening of WA's borders has provided the much-needed return of their key markets. At the same time, businesses have continued to struggle with ongoing acute staff shortages, with service levels and opening hours being frequently impacted.

Our challenge as a leadership team has been to ensure we are providing appropriate levels of industry support in response to the array of opportunities and challenges presented at this time.

Key Achievements 2021/22

DESTINATION MARKETING AND VISITOR SERVICING

- Drive Trails Interstate Marketing Campaign*: In partnership with Australia's South West and through funding from the Federal Government, MRBTA worked with 85 members to develop the Drive Your Story campaign comprising five iconic drive trails, which targets the interstate market.
- South West Wanderer Pass: \$250,000 in State Government funding was secured through Australia's South West to fund a voucher campaign in support of South West tour and experience providers. The entirety of the funds was delivered directly to operators.
- Destination Website: The new site launched in November 2021 and by the end of the year met key metrics in line with Google's Core Web Vitals, achieving a 99% performance score, which is well above industry averages.
- Visitor Servicing: MRBTA has played a key role in preparing to welcome passengers travelling to Busselton on the direct flights from Melbourne with Jetstar, and those arriving in Busselton on cruise ships.

In May 2022, in consultation with members, the City of Busselton and Dunsborough Yallingup Chamber of Commerce, MRBTA closed the Dunsborough Visitor Centre to further its investment in our digital channels, improve the experience at the flagship visitor centres, and expand the distribution of quality information at locations where there is a high visitor footprint.

MEMBER TRAINING AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

- One-to-one product development support* delivered to 30 member businesses, resulting in 10 new trade-ready experiences.
- Digital marketing mentoring* delivered to 85 member businesses, with nine businesses receiving 1-1 mentoring.
- Welcoming Travel: MRBTA has become the first region in Australia to partner with Husbands That Travel (HTT) and Gay and Lesbian Tourism Australia (GALTA) on a 'Welcoming Travel' program to assist and inspire LGBTQ+ travellers to the region*.
- Ecotourism Australia Certification: With support from MRBTA and the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River, five member businesses have achieved certification with Ecotourism Australia.

*Delivered in partnership with Australia's South West, with funding from the Australian Government under the Recovery for Regional Tourism program, an initiative of the \$1 billion COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund.

2. CEO REPORT



ADVOCACY

- Staff shortages: MRBTA and Margaret River Wine Association secured funding through Tourism WA and the South West Development Commission to commission ACIL Allen to develop a pre-feasibility study to validate the region's need for short-term worker accommodation.
- Short-stay accommodation: MRBTA formed a member reference group with members to inform its response to the State Government's Position Statement: Planning for Tourism and guidelines, submitted in February 2022.

BRAND AND DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

- Margaret River Region Destination Brand: Execution has rolled out across MRBTA's digital channels and as part of the interstate market drive trails campaign.
- ECO Destination status: MRBTA partnered with the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River to become WA's first ECO Destination.

BUSHFIRE RELIEF

- Boranup Tour Operators were provided with a relief package valuing over \$70,000, delivered by Australia's South West, Tourism WA and MRBTA.

CAPES FOUNDATION SITE IMPROVEMENTS

- Ground Handling Services: MRBTA has invested extensively in training and infrastructure to welcome Jetstar flights.
- Eagles Heritage: A major extension and upgrade of the entry building took place in December 2021. \$100,000 State Government REDs grant funding has been secured to accelerate the improvement of the aviaries and interpretation around the site.
- Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse: The lighthouse tower will reopen in October 2022, following a year of restoration by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA).
- Mammoth and Lake Cave: Following the devastating Boranup bushfire in December 2021 MRBTA has undertaken extensive repairs at both Mammoth and Lake Cave. Mammoth Cave reopened in January 2022 and Lake Cave reopened in June 2022. Work to repair the suspended deck at Lake Cave will continue over the coming months.

2. CEO REPORT



Membership Survey Results

Our 2022 Annual Membership Survey demonstrated a high level of appreciation from members for the organisation's Strategic Directions, as well as key initiatives such as the Drive Trails project, and of our consumer marketing and visitor servicing efforts.

The survey has also offered direction for future areas of improvement in the support required from MRBTA. This includes increased destination marketing and training and development opportunities, with a focus on capturing new markets, and niche elements of the region's tourism offering.

MRBTA Team

Supported by the Board and the contributions of our staff, we continue to build a team which possesses the skills and experience needed to support the region and our members. I am extremely proud to lead a team of 130 employees who demonstrate an outstanding commitment to excellence, a collaborative approach to their work and an openness to doing things in new ways for the benefit of the region.



Sharna Kearney

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER**

3. Our Board of Directors



Stuart Hicks AO
CHAIR

Fellow of the Institute of Company Directors, Stuart has led key state and national bodies and has served as commissioner of the WA Planning Commission and as chairman of the South West Development Commission. In 2006 Stuart was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for services to industry, government and the community.



Janine Carter
**THE LANDSMITH COLLECTION
/VOYAGER ESTATE
DEPUTY CHAIR**

Janine is The Landsmith Collection's Head of Tourism & Business Development – a portfolio of brands including Voyager Estate, Bullo River Station and a number of properties in development including Wallcliffe House. Janine has held roles with Margaret River Wine Association and in the fields of events management, journalism and PR.



Glenn Callegari
**HILLZEEZ DOWN
SOUTH SURF SHOPS**

Glenn Callegari is a Certified Practising Accountant and worked at Wesfarmers before returning to Busselton and purchasing the Hillzeez Down South Surf Shop Group. Glenn has expanded the business and now owns stores in Busselton, Dunsborough, Margaret River, Bunbury and Albany.

3. OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Keith Warrick
**EAGLE BAY
BREWING**

General Manager at Eagle Bay Brewery, Keith has held similar roles at several Margaret River wineries and has over 20 years' senior management experience. Keith is currently the President of Smiths Beach Surf Life Saving Club and has served on several boards.



Evan Lewis
**BROADWATER
RESORT**

Evan is the Owner and Resort Manager of Broadwater Resort Busselton. Evan has 30 years' experience in senior roles within the tourism and hospitality sector and has held several Regional Executive Marketing and Global Communications Roles with multinational companies.



David Willcox
**COMMON GROUND
TRAILS**

David has established Common Ground Trails, one of the state's leading trail planning and design consultancies. David is a multi-talented professional with a broad experience and interests within tourism related industries, including as general manager and lead designer or Willcox & Associates Architects.



Barry House
BUSSELTON JETTY

Barry House notably served as a member of the State Parliament (Member for the South West Region) for 30 years. His dedication and service to the area was recognised in 2019 when he was awarded an Order of Australia



Matt Credaro
**CREDARO FAMILY
ESTATE & SHELTER
BREWING CO.**

Matt brings to the board his experience of current and previous roles on several boards and his involvement with hospitality, retail and tourism experiences in the region. Matt is part of the fourth generation at Credaro Family Estate and is also an owner at Shelter Brewing Co..



Kelly Hick
**DUNSBOROUGH
RIDGE RETREAT & KLH
CONSULTING**

Kelly is an experienced multi-sector Board and Committee Member and a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. A former lawyer, Kelly has experience at senior executive level across professional services and member-based organisations.



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